

FROM THE ARCHIVES

When Hitch and The Birds Came to the Coast

by Andrea Granahan

In the early 60s Alfred Hitchcock was ‘The Man’ in Hollywood. Not only did he have an immensely popular television series but he had just made the box office hit movie *Psycho*. He wanted to make another. In 1961 he read Daphne du Maurier’s short story *The Birds* and hired a screenplay writer to turn it into a script.

He discovered Bodega Bay while shooting his film *Without a Doubt* in Santa Rosa. The location crew came to Bodega Bay to scout for settings and to find lodgings for everyone. There wasn’t much choice in those days. It was The Tides or a campground. Hollywood may throw money around in some places but when it comes to locations they are penny-pinchers. They tried to bargain with Wanda Zankich, then owner of The Tides, but they met their match. On the 30th anniversary of the film’s release in 1963, Wanda said in an interview “They told me they would put Bodega Bay on the map and wouldn’t I cut the prices. I told them those are my rates, what I always charge. Take it or leave it. They took it.”

They decided to use Rose Gaffney’s house on the west side of the bay. Rose was still battling with PG&E over her land and was extremely wary., but the Location Chief charmed her. The house was run down, Rose was just using it as a weekend retreat then. They rebuilt the entire façade and added a barn and a gazebo to shoot the birthday party scene. After the film, the late Donna Freeman bought the gazebo at Rose’s estate sale and moved it to her *Compass Rose Gardens* (*Secret Gardens*). Many couples have been married under the gazebo including some of Donna’s children.

Hitch used locals as extras as he cinematically combined Bodega and Bodega Bay into one town. He and the cast got to know everyone while the towns had fun watching Hollywood at work making “movie magic”. People told a lot of stories about the filming during the anniversary celebration in 1993.

When they filmed Tippi Hedren, dressed in her green

suit and mink coat she wore in almost every scene, she slipped and fell into the ice cold Bay. While everyone else scrambled to rescue her, Hitch simply turned to his assistant and said in his slow, notable British accent,



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“We are going to need another mink.”

Some of the film crew had the nasty job of going to the dump to film seagulls. They tied rotten meat to their cameras to get the birds dodging right into the camera. Real and phony birds were used in the filming. Some of phony crows found a home at the Casino in Bodega where Hitch and the cast enjoyed libations.

Whenever Hitch drove up from the city in his limo he had pockets full of matchbooks from San Francisco’s famous eateries and night clubs. He handed them out to the local kids. He seemed to have had a soft spot for children.

While filming the scene when Tippi finds Suzanne Pleshette’s body pecked to death by birds, a school bus let out a first grader at the corner. As the little girl walked home she saw Pleshette in her make-up and fainted. She was carried to her house. Hitch stopped the filming and went into the home where the child lay on a couch with Pleshette and the make-up artist. He had the artist remove and then redo the make-up until finally the child laughed. Hitch got up and went out to resume filming saying, “Good. She won’t have nightmares now.”

He let the locals watch while they set up scenes as long as when the clapper cried “Action!” everyone ducked out of sight. While the filming went on Hitch endeared himself to locals, but was apparently stalking Tippi Hedren. The film *The Girl* was made in 2012, and Tippi was very candid in interviews.

Hitch became the High Lord in Bodega Bay. He had English sole flown from Britain while he was in town. That annoyed Wanda Zankich. “I told him our local fish was fresher, but he insisted. I thought he was a snob but before long we learned to like each other.”

When the film was shown during the anniversary celebrations in Bodega, it was like opening up an old family album. Instead of succumbing to the

horror and suspense, people called out to each other.

“Look at what a hottie Glenice was!”

“Stevie, you’re so little then.”

“How’d they make Rose’s old house look so good?”

Just two films that qualify as “folk movies”. One is *Gone with the Wind* in the South, and other is *The Birds* in Bodega and Bodega Bay. ■



Thank you to Bruce and Connie Martin for their generous donation of *The Birds* photos to RBHS, taken when they were young students at SRJC.

